

STOPPED FOR A TRAFFIC TICKET:  
A GETAWAY SCALE INDEX

BY SAM SOURYAL

Have you ever wondered why you wind up each year with more traffic tickets than your friends whom you consider worse drivers than you are? The chances are they talk their way out of them, at least some. They know how to cultivate the officers tactfully, how to sell them a good story, and how to secure their collaboration. These are obviously delicate tasks which involve considerable risks. In order to be able to handle these tasks successfully you must have a talent for game planning and strategy. More importantly, before you attempt to play the game of evading traffic tickets you must be better informed about your chances. It is, therefore, important and necessary that you familiarize yourself with the Getaway Scale Index (GSI).

In this time and age it is fair to assume that most American drivers over the age of 25 have been stopped at least once by a policeman for a traffic violation or a related matter. The number of the unfortunate who fail to convince the officer with their ingenious excuses, and end up with a ticket is reportedly high and may run in the tens of millions each year. The number of the fortunate, on the other hand, who are able to talk their way out with or without a warning slip probably runs as high if not higher. In summary your chances of getting a break on your bad driving venture seem to be about 50:50.

Assuming we all desire a break, your chances of talking your way out of such situations naturally depend on many factors. These include the nature of the violation, the laws of the state, the time and location of the stoppage, but most importantly on your attitude and the language you use in addressing the officer. Understanding "where the officer is coming from" can help improve your attitude and select appropriate language. Furthermore, a better familiarity with the officer's training and the work habits of his department may further help you strike "just the right dialogue" which could get you off without undue embarrassment. "Rubbing the officer the wrong way", as you may well know, could cost you dearly. This can include a night in jail, a hefty fine, and a lot of explanation to the folks at home who may wonder why all of a sudden you were gone for 24 hours.

If you were then planning a cross country excursion, how would you be able to predict the treatment you may receive from the different policemen you are bound to encounter? They serve fifty states and technically belong to over 40,000 independent agencies. As you will observe, they may come in all shapes, forms, and sizes. But so will their orientation, style, and temperament. You might for instance be stopped by a state trooper, by a municipal police officer, by a deputy sheriff, by a marshall, by a constable, or even by a game warden. None of these titles can obviously tell you much about their intelligence, compassion, tolerance, or willingness to listen. And since your experience with the police is certainly limited (unless you are a police officer yourself or a habitual

criminal) you will be uncertain as to the "rating" of the next officer you will meet.

So that you may be spared the embarrassment and perhaps the futility of knuckling your knees before an irate, pharoah-like policeman, we have developed for you a list of some common police behavior patterns based on their appearance, values, and habits. These include for instance, estimated age, size, race, sex, color of uniform, headwear, footwear, as well as habits like smoking or chewing, etc. This list will be your Getaway Scale Index or GSI. Next to each listing you will find a corresponding numerical value. Plus numbers indicate a positive quality in terms of the officer being receptive, understanding, and friendly. Pluses should obviously maximize your chances of getting a break and may even earn you a free ride to your destination as well.

Minus numbers, on the other hand, will indicate a negative response in terms of the officer being indifferent, intransigent, or mean. Minuses should clearly minimize your chances and if they are stacked up high enough they may cause you to be zipped off to jail in a prone position inside a squad car with no door handles. The highest possible rating for each listing is +10 and the lowest is -10. If you figured out that the officer's overall score is in the minus, then you are better advised to abandon any talking plans, sit properly, and just nod apologetically.

To use the scale effectively, you must watch closely the individual officer who is destined to process you from the moment you can see him in your rear-view mirror to the moment you reluctantly

submit your driver's license and vehicle registration. Based on your observation skills you should be able to notice and compute your officer's pluses and minuses. The resulting figure will represent your getaway chances.

It is impossible, of course, to be entirely accurate in such an abstract scale. The officer's personality, education, religion, or occupational stress, etc., may change and complicate the rating process. Nevertheless, if you master this index, your chances will improve.

GETAWAY SCALE INDEX (GSI)

BY AGE:

Between 20-25 (they are mostly rookies and tend to act "gung ho")	-4
Between 25-35 (they seem more mature and many of them are probably attending night classes at a college nearby)	+3
Between 35-50 (they are mostly so experienced that your story will sound like a broken record to them. They are experts in listening and writing at the same time)	-3
Over 50 (they are either too paternalistic or too cynical..you should be able tell by the tone of his voice)	+5-

BY RACE:

Black officer on black driver (they may be prone to show off their authority except for the few "brothers" who may be still thinking in terms of the 60's)	-2
Opposite race (they tend to be extra careful not to be accused of being prejudiced).	+3
White officer on white driver (add 2 points for a well-tanned officer)	0

BY SEX:

Female officer on a female driver (in a Cadillac or Lincoln) (add 4 points for a little old lady specially if driving a regular inconspicuous car. Add 1 more point for each kid sitting in the back seat.)	-4
--	----

BY SEX continued

Male officer on a female driver (add 2 points for a young attractive blonde. Subtract 8 points for an overtly flirting driver, especially if unattractive)	+5
Female officer on a male driver (subtract 4 points for a macho-type driver, especially one who doesn't sound like he means Ma'am when he says it)	-2
Male officer on male driver (add 3 points if the driver is middle-aged and neatly groomed and dressed in a business suit. Subtract 5 points for a driver wearing a necklace and 7 points for an earring)	0

BY WEIGHT:

Heavy, 250 pounds or more (they tend to be more jolly and like to be recognized as such. Subtract 7 points for an overweight female officer)	+5
Average weight, 165-195 pounds	0
Skinny, below 165 pounds (they tend to be tense and on the defensive. Many of them suffer from early ulcers)	-4

BY HEIGHT:

Tall, over 6'2" (they tend to be athletically oriented and "above" little things)	+6
Average height, 5'7" to 6'2" (note the difference in average among Chicano and Oriental officers in Mountain and Western States)	0
Short, below 5'7" (they tend to suffer from an inferiority complex and seem to be afraid of being jumped by anyone an inch taller)	-5

#### BY RANK

Lieutenant and above (they can afford to play the game of police-community relations, especially since they have no quotas to meet)	+8
Sergeant or equivalent (these are the Lions of the jungle who go unchallenged by little game. They may not attempt to stop you, but will certainly give you a look that can chill your bones)	+6
Trooper, patrolman, deputy, or equivalent	0
A police officer with a cadet riding along (his primary concern is to impress the cadet and to save himself a lot of silly questions to be asked by the kid later)	-7

#### BY UNIFORM

Solid navy blue or solid khaki (they tend to be more professional. Add 2 points for brass buttons)	+6
Solid brown or gray	+2
Light shirt and dark slacks, same color	-2
Shirt with contrast color pocket flaps and epaulettes (subtract 2 points for a lemon or pink color shirt)	-4
Tie, matching or contrasting color (subtract 1 point for a hook-on tie, subtract 4 points for a tie pin in the shape of handcuffs)	+2

#### BY HAIR LENGTH

Regular police hair length (they tend to be either new rookies or too square. The latter should be considered rare. Subtract 4 points for a crew cut)	-2
Collar length hair (they tend to be fairly liberal and may even support your criticism of the "stupid law")	+5

BY HAIR LENGTH, continued

Below collar length -7  
(they tend to be basically rebellious. To survive on the job though they have to continue producing the maximum quota expected)

Ear length sideburns +3  
(they tend to maintain a contemporary social outlook. Subtract 1 point for each additional half an inch)

BY FOOTWEAR

Cowboy boots, calfskin -4  
(they tend to think in terms of outlaws and fugitives. Add 2 points for alligator boots)

Knee-high motorcycle boots -5  
(these are the diehards of the old Harley Davidson gang. Now they mostly use Kawasakis. Subtract 3 points for Hondas or Yamahas)

Uniform matching shoes +5  
(they tend to be fairly practical and economically-oriented.)

Uniform unmatching shoes -7  
(they are undisciplined and rowdy. Subtract 2 points for sneakers!)

BY HEADWEAR

Steel or plastic helmet -5  
(they tend to think and act like Marines. Subtract 3 points if name on helmet doesn't match the name tag on chest)

Soft hat, NO golden braid +4  
(they tend to be fairly progressive and reasonable. Subtract 2 points for each braid.)

Straw hat -3  
(they tend to be more sympathetic to the little man in general and to farmers in particular. Subtract 2 points for each inch of sweat ring around the hat)



BY HEADWEAR, continued

Smokey Bear hat +6  
(they tend to maintain the old rules of chivalry. They act like benevolent Colonialists in the North and like Southern Gentlemen in the South)

BY WEAPON

Displaying more than one gun, any kind -8  
Brandishing a shotgun -10  
(a special advice is necessary here: sit with you hands clearly on the steering wheel. Try not to sneeze or you will confuse the officer)  
Revolver, large -2  
Revolver, small +3  
Automatic pistol +6  
(they tend to be well trained and have confidence in their weapon)

BY SHOULDER PATCH

Two neat patches, any size +3  
Two patches plus a flag -3  
(subtract 2 points for a reduced flag with LESS than 50 stars or 13 stripes)  
One shoulder patch -1  
No shoulder patch -4

BY GLASSES

Regular eye glasses +5  
(they tend to be more intellectual. Add 2 points if the officer has a book in hand. They usually like to read on Psychology of Deviant Behavior)

#### BY GLASSES, continued

Large framed casual glasses (they tend to be more liberal and mod. Add 2 points for Polaroid or Ray Ban. Subtract 7 points for reflectors or mirror glasses)	+4
Mac Arthur-style shades (they tend to be too authoritarian and military minded)	-3
Small round wire-framed glasses (they tend to be conservative and extremely suspicious)	-6
Small round wire-framed DARK glasses (these are either plain mean or are trying to scare you. Both are as bad.)	-8

#### BY CHEWING HABIT

Chewing gum (they seem progressive as well as aware of the national breath problem. Add 2 points for Spearmint or Trident gum)	+5
Chewing tobacco, one cheek bulged (subtract 2 points for two cheek bulges and 2 more points if the officer spat at your front left tire. A special advice: don't look at the tire, just wash it later)	-6
Chewing on a tooth pick (they should be in a grateful mood, they have just had a free meal!)	+8

#### BY SMOKING HABIT

Smoking cigarettes (subtract 3 points if the officer blew smoke in your face and 5 points if he dropped ashes in your car)	-2
Smoking a pipe (they tend to be more reflective and scholarly. Add 2 points for a good tobacco with sweet aroma)	+6
Smoking a cigar (subtract 3 points if the cigar is too fat or too thin. Subtract 2 points if the bottom of the cigar is pretty chewed up)	-4

BY SMOKING HABIT, continued

Dipping snuff

-9

(when you see him do it in front of you, don't stare.  
Act as if you didn't see it. Otherwise you will be a  
definite loser)

The above index is certainly not exhaustive. But it should be sufficiently representative to enable you to assign to any category not included its proper index value. You might, to your surprise, encounter a police officer who may not fit any of these listing and thus you will be unable to figure out your chances with him. This could admittedly be a disappointing situation. But we trust that by then you would have acquired sufficient GSI training to save yourself any grave embarrassment. There is, however, one major caveat to GSI: you must not only be good at addition and subtraction, you must be able to do them as fast and as accurately as a "radar gun".